



Slough Children First Interim Business Plan 2022/25

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Business Plan

The underlying plan to deliver the key priorities of Slough Children First from April 2022 to March 2025.

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1. Introduction

The business plan for Slough Children First from April 2022 – March 2025 sets out the company's strategic priorities for the next three years. It shows how the priorities will be delivered and how the impact of the plan will be measured through the outcomes achieved for children and their families.

2. Foreword by Tony Hunter, Chair of Slough Children First Board

It is my pleasure to introduce the Slough Children First's three-year Business Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25. As new Chair from May 2021, and with a board combining continuity with fresh faces, it's been an exciting few months, and a privilege to build upon the legacy of my predecessor Robert Tapsfield and his board. They, alongside determined staff in all roles and at all levels, drove services forward for the most vulnerable children, young people, and families in Slough. It's now good to know that, following our foster care inspection, we are not assessed as inadequate in any area, for the first time in many years. To be in this improved position amid the personal and organisational pressures of Covid is especially commendable. So, I have joined an organisation with a proud legacy of improvement and am absolutely committed to build further on everyone's achievements to date.

In a major development since our last plan, we have become a wholly owned company of the council, symbolised by the change of name and more importantly the quality of the relationship with the council. Targeted early help and "not in education, employment or training" (NEET) services have also been transferred to our company as a statement of confidence. These are moves I very much welcome as indicative of our shared vision and commitment alongside the council and other partners to the achievement of every child's safety, health, and welfare.

All this said, neither we nor the council harbour any illusions about the challenges we face. The council and the company are seeking to address unprecedented financial challenges. Slough Children First must of course contribute to solutions along with all council directorates and functions. But children's experiences and outcomes are what everyone in Slough Children First is here for, and what I've seen shining through in all my dealings with our staff so far. This plan retains its focus on the four areas previously identified, i.e., quality improvement through a child's journey, the stability of our workforce, being sustainable, development of child-focused partnerships.

So, the road ahead is tough. But by showing the values-driven and child-focused determination and resilience we've demonstrated to date, I'm sure we'll build on our momentum and play our full part in making Slough a great place in which children and young people can thrive and achieve their full potential.

3. Our Vision and Values

The Company vision is that every child in Slough should be '**Safe, Secure and Successful**'.

To help achieve this, our mission is we should all be **constantly working together to improve the lives of children and young people by protecting, supporting, and enabling them to thrive**.

The key principles supporting this work are:

- Children and young people and their voice are at the heart of all that we do.
- Working with the strengths of children and families to help them resolve challenges and improve their outcomes.
- To build and maintain effective practitioner relationships with children and families that help to bring about and sustain positive change within families.
- To build and sustain effective partnership working to ensure the whole system around a child / family is supporting positive change.

Our work is guided by values which can be seen below and everyone who works for Slough Children First are expected to work towards these.

Child-focussed

Honest and respectful

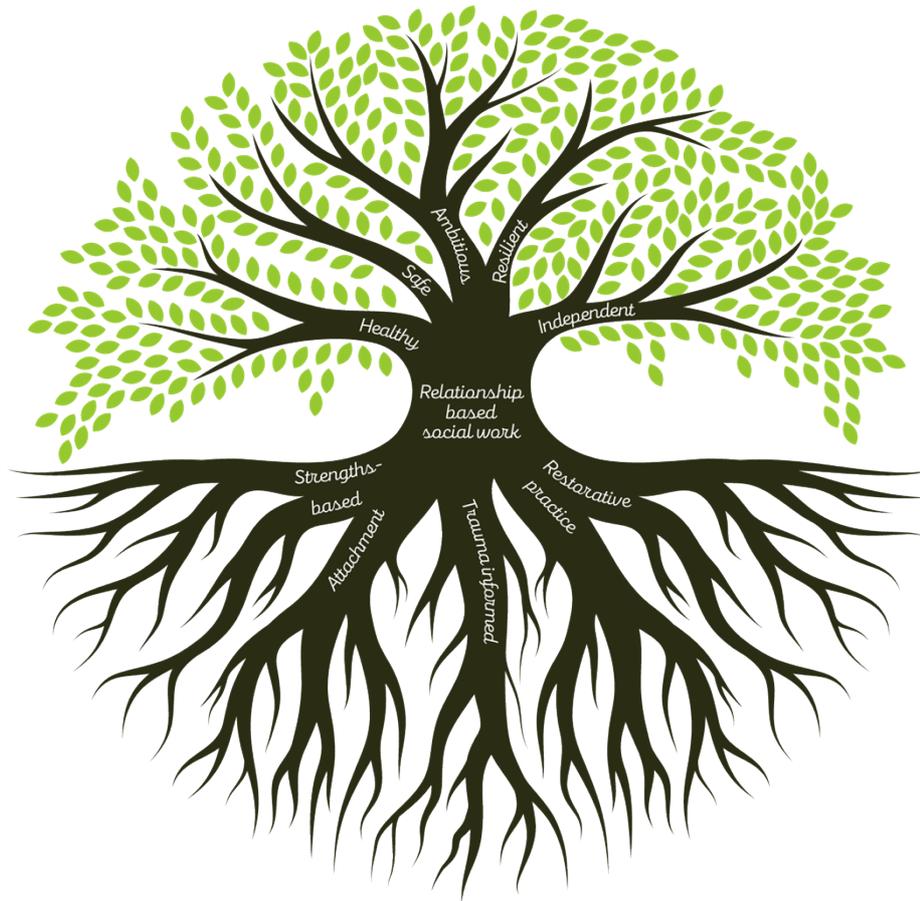
Improving constantly

Looking ahead

Delivering together

These values are reflected in our new *Practice Model – the Slough Approach* which we are launching in early 2022. This has been developed to provide us with a clear focus on the way in which we aim to work with children, families, and partners in Slough.

We have based our framework on a Relationship Based approach and this is underpinned by four key strands.



Attachment Theory - Early experiences shape our narratives and sense of ourselves and others' as well as ability to cope with stress and regulate emotions.

Restorative Practice - working 'with' others and alongside them, instead of making decisions 'for' them or doing things 'to' them.

Strengths Based – shifting conversations to be about strengths rather than deficits, enabling positive narratives about potential for change, while being clear about 'what we are worried about'.

Trauma Informed - identifies and addresses adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) and trauma, adapting the way we work to consider the impact of trauma, particularly through creating safe supportive relationships as a foundation for challenge.

4. Strategic aims for the Company to deliver its vision

The Company has four strategic aims each with its own set of priorities to support delivery to achieve these. The programmes of work to deliver these strategic aims are contained within the improvement plan in appendix A. The company has developed a transformation programme which addresses areas of key concerns for the company, and this is explored further under section 5.

Monitoring of progress and impact of plans will be overseen by the sub-Committees of the Company Board led by an independent non-executive director (NED). Through these strategic aims the company will focus on 'getting to good' and ensuring all services provide value for money in the most cost-efficient way, so by delivering on our aims we can contribute to the financial pressures in the council.

The overall plans in appendix A are supported by several business cases which provide a greater level of detail of specific delivery activities. In total, the business cases are looking to deliver £4.7m of savings in 2022/23 to deliver a balanced budget position. Details of which can be found in section 10 Financial plans.

Our strategic aims

1) Quality improvement throughout a child's journey.

Aim

Consistently good practice throughout a child's journey ensures better outcomes for children and families

Priorities

- Promote the voice of the child and hold the child in mind in all our work
- Safeguard and promote needs
- Quality partnership working improves outcomes for all children
- Improved and evidenced outcomes

A previous focus on compliance has provided a strong foundation upon which to develop and maintain good social work practice in Slough. Our intention over the next few years is to achieve a 'good' Ofsted rating and drive better outcomes for children and families.

This we will achieve through continuing to improve the quality of practice in all services throughout the child's journey and enabled by the following:

- Implement a new social work Practice Model in 2022 to give social workers a solid and consistent base to enable consistently good social work practice
- Use our improvement plan activity to hone into areas for further improvement
- Continue to develop existing and new operational partnerships across a range of universal, targeted, and statutory services which effectively meet the needs of families and learn from those who are good or better.

Our improvement plan activity details specific actions to be undertaken and the outcomes required to achieve good practice. Future improvement plans will be informed by external reviews of practice to be undertaken where we feel this will add value. We will use the regular and forensic lens on practice Ofsted provides through the annual conversation process and inspections, whilst using our own performance management information and quality assurance activity to identify the areas of improvement required and the actions to achieve this.

Our regular scrutiny of key performance indicators will provide an update on compliance and the quarterly audit programme provides a lens on the quality of practice. The

company currently has a target of 85% of all children's files to be requires improvement or above, and to achieve a good Ofsted rating we know at least 70% of all children's files need to be good or above.

Based on a current baseline of 24% of children's files which are currently good or above (September 2021), we are aiming for 30% good in six months, 45% in 12 months, 55% in 18 months and 70% of all children's files to be good in two years.

This will be achieved through a focus on quality practice as all stages of a child's journey and ensuring all frontline staff have caseloads at or below target levels which allows them to be the good social worker they want to be. The extra capacity of three Practice Improvement Mentors provided through the DfE transformation programme enabled a focus on the basics of good social work practice whilst Heads of Service were able to lead their services through periods of high demand and increasing complexity, and the impact of this additional capacity has shown itself in improvements in both contractual and company KPIs.

The company knows this additional capacity is crucial to achieving our target of 70% of all children's files to be good in two years to be able to achieve a good Ofsted rating within the next three years.

This all collectively together will provide effective and successful practice which will manage the need for long term, statutory services as shown by weekly and monthly performance reporting.

Stability of workforce

Aim

A stable and effective workforce which enables better outcomes for children and families

Priorities

- Attract, support, develop and retain quality staff and effective leaders
- A positive culture which provides professionally fulfilling employment
- Effective communication mechanisms

The company knows its staff are its greatest asset and having a stable, permanent workforce led by strong leaders is fundamental to delivering our aim of consistently good, cost effective and sustainable services which improves outcomes for children and families.

The stability of practice workstream as detailed in section 4.4.1 will be the lynchpin of our workforce development strategy, and future activity will be concentrated on activities which are proven to have the greatest impact.

Current workforce projects will be continued with the aim of decreasing the number of agency staff to 20% or less, reduce the need to purchase additional capacity as provided by the Innovate teams, and ensure a sustainable, permanent workforce

2) **Being sustainable**

Aim

A secure and sustainable organisation which provides high quality and cost-effective outcomes

Priorities

- Strong and transparent governance
- Evidenced use of resources efficiently to meet children's needs
- Value for Money
- Maximising partnerships to deliver better aligned services which achieve better outcomes for children

The company is focused on improving services for children and their families, whilst having its cost base in the best possible sustainable and cost-effective position it can be. To achieve this, the company has developed a series of ambitious business cases to implement over the next few years across a range of services. These are underpinned by a set of principles to ensure our strategic aims are not lost.

- Safeguarding of children is core principle behind any decision.
- Good quality services will deliver better outcomes and a more cost-effective model.
- Working in collaboration with key strategic partners with the principle of prevention at all levels in the system
- Savings to be aligned with the overall Council vision, Slough Children First's vision and those of its partners
- Transformational improvements to achieve better experiences and outcomes for children and young people
- Protection of frontline services to enable and support quality and consistency of social work practice and enable children and families to thrive in Slough
- Ensure processes and procedures working with partners have purpose and add value to the work to meet the needs of families, whilst minimising bottle necks which cause drift and delay.

3) **Development of child focused partnerships**

Aim

Key strategic partners working together to ensure the best outcomes for our most vulnerable children.

Priorities

- Work with key partners to develop the children and young people plan
- Development of community offerings through the voluntary sector to support children and families
- A review of tri partite panels with Health and Education to ensure the child is at the centre of the outcome with all parties working in collaboration
- Build strong relations with local providers to help develop sufficiency of placements for our young people.

- Work in strategic partnership with the council on accommodation options for our young people.
- Developing close links with adults to ensure robust transition planning for our children with disability to ensure a seamless and transparent transition of support offering

Since it has been established the company has played an important role in strategic and operational partnerships in Slough to maximise outcomes for children, young people, and their families in Slough. Operationally partnerships are effective, and individuals have remained resolute despite very challenging circumstances during the pandemic to do their best for children and families in Slough.

Strong, strategic partnerships are key to achieving our strategic aims over the next three years. The diagram below shows a range of partners with whom the company works with to keep children safe. These partners include a large and diverse range of community, voluntary and faith organisations who provide vital support to Slough residents.



By May 2022 the council will have developed a new corporate plan. The Slough Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) is a key delivery vehicle to promote outcomes for children. In 2021, this multi-agency board reviewed its previous priorities and agreed five new priorities, all of which align with the mission of the Company.

These are as follows

- Good physical health and an active lifestyle
- Positive mental health and wellbeing
- Supporting our children with SEND
- Continue to achieve well at KS4 and KS5 and prepare for adulthood:
- Safeguarding/ Protection from harm

The Company recognises successful outcomes for the most vulnerable children in Slough will be delivered by key strategic partners all working together. Forging closer working relations with the child at the centre of the decision making will drive better

outcomes for the child and provide them the best life chances. This is also likely to result in more cost-effective operating model for all agencies working together as the needs are addressed in a timely manner by the right agency as and when needed.

Over the next three years we will plan and implement a range of strategic and operational approaches with partners both within Slough and beyond, to include good and outstanding local authorities whom we can learn from and work with. This will be to both improve current services and develop new, sustainable services in a way which provides alternative options to statutory children’s services to meet the needs of Slough residents. The way in which this partnership will develop and what they will achieve will be included in the improvement plan as it is further developed.

5. The company’s transformation programme

The company’s transformation programme is a three-year programme which commenced in 2021 to drive further improvements in practice to enable better outcomes for families, develop the workforce and deliver a more sustainable model for the future. The bulk of the work is expected to be implemented by March 2023, with new practices embedded into the company’s business as usual processes

5.1. Stability of Workforce - To develop Slough as a place where staff want to come, work, and stay

One key challenge for 2022 is to reduce reliance on Innovate teams which is a very expensive delivery model for the company, where staff have capped caseloads and are paid more than our agency and permanent staff. Increasing the levels of permanent staff will help significantly in achieving this goal.

The aim of the company is to increase the levels of permanent staff and reduce turnover. The ‘Stability of Workforce’ workstream developed a new ‘attract, support, develop and retain’ approach to stabilise and support the workforce.



Increasing our permanent workforce

The company is targeting an increase in permanent staff to both improve the stability of the workforce, achieve required efficiencies, and ensure sustainable budgets.

There are a variety of projects underway to achieve this.

- Overseas recruitment

- ‘Grow our own’, including social work apprenticeships, step up programmes and supporting newly qualified social workers through their first year of practice in the ASYE programme
- Conversion of agency staff to permanent staff

The company’s workforce strategy for 2022 – 2024 aims to build on 2021 successes through the following projects:

- Further overseas recruitment
- Further development of our ‘grow your own’ at more senior levels through a social work academy and the continuation of a ‘post ASYE’ group to provide an on-going support model
- Introduction of an enhanced pay offer for frontline posts where this will support recruitment to ensure the company is well positioned in the southeast region market to attract and retain great people
- Work with agency staff to further promote conversion from agency to permanent
- Use all opportunities for a workforce mix to meet families needs and achieve a permanent workforce
- Develop the company’s culture, supported by the renewed stability in the company’s leadership team and achieved by listening to and working with all staff in the company.

We are working on the marketing of Slough as a great place to work and develop its unique selling points. Slough comprises diverse communities with high pockets of deprivation which makes social work a challenge at times. However, this can be seen as a positive to those aspiring to develop their careers and we need to work with a variety of partners including agencies and trade publications to ensure we are promoting all the positives around Slough.

These plans are expected to increase the number of permanent frontline staff which has historically proven the most difficult to recruit to. Currently our permanent frontline workforce is 53% and our aim is to have 75% permanent frontline staff by March 2023, 80% by March 2024 and 85% by March 2025. In the current climate, this would make us comparable to close statistical neighbors’.

Reducing turnover of staff

Permanent staff turnover was 33% at December 2021, with a target of 20% by 2025. Turnover rates have worsened nationally over the past 18 months. The company has started to see turnover across the company where historically turnover was largely from front line staff. The company aims to reduce the level of staff turnover through greater support, clear career pathways and improved workforce experience.

This strategy will take time to deliver but it will create the building blocks for a strong, sustainable workforce of the future. Fundamental to the success of all strategies in this business plan is the ability to retain experienced permanent staff.

5.2. Quality of practice

As highlighted above, stability in the workforce is a key factor in driving and sustaining improvements in quality of practice and ensuring outcomes for children and families. The transformation programme has introduced practice improvement mentors to

support front line staff in the development and maintenance of consistently good social work practice. This has been well received by staff and has been viewed positively by Ofsted.

The Virtual School in Slough has been delivering exceptional results for children looked after for several years. 2021 saw their remit widen to all children with a social worker with positive outcomes already being reported on children being enabled to access education where this had been difficult.

The company has restructured Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) services, amalgamating with the Virtual school. The impact of the amalgamation can already be seen in a short time with a reduction in the reported numbers of NEET from 9.4% to 4.84%, placing our performance in the top quartile. 53.5% of Care Leavers aged 19-21 years were in employment, education, or training (EET), above Statistical Neighbour averages of 51.7% and England 52%

5.3. Contextual Safeguarding Team

A further initiative aimed at addressing demands in a cost-effective manner has been the introduction of the Contextual Safeguarding Team in July 2021. The team is having a positive impact on children and young people at risk of extra familial harm via children who are held directly open to the team and over 100 case consultations with social workers in frontline services. This team was well received by Ofsted in the January 2022 focused visit who stated *'the exploitation team provide a holistic view of children; multi-agency mapping works well and supports the effective management of risk.'*

The team provide an alternative pathway to child protection plans for children and young people through intensive support focused on the whole family to mitigate risks of exploitation. The team has successfully stepped down 13 children so far to Early Help and the continuation of the Contextual Safeguarding team is a key area for delivering a sustainable future.

5.4. Sustainability

Slough Borough Council face significant financial challenges and Slough Children First have a role to play in delivering best value and creating a sustainable model for the future. The ability to manage demands and supply in an effective manner will deliver a more sustainable model.

5.4.1. Development of targeted Early Help services to develop a targeted continuum of support

To help manage demands in the most cost-effective manner, a key area of focus for 2022 is the development of targeted early help and edge of care services. Having such services in place will provide timely interventions with families when needs first emerge, to avoid escalation of needs into more costly statutory services. Also, to support the gap between early help and children in need to ensure that there is an effective step down.

A key dependency is to ensure there is an effective continuum of universal through to targeted effective early help offer in the community. The role of children's centres and their outputs is key to this.

5.4.2. Using commissioning to meet demand in the most cost-effective way

For our children in care, the key driver is the provision of care close to their home, education, family, and friends. Our strategy is one of rehabilitating children back home, working with the child and family to address safeguarding concerns. Where a return home is not possible, finding support from known family and friends and achieving early permanency is key.

We know children's prospects will improve in a stable environment, so if the above avenues prove unsuccessful, then seeking permanency arrangements through special guardianship orders, long-term fostering or adoption is the next path. Slough is small in size, so much of our commissioning is through consortiums to enhance economies of scales and achieve greater value for money, so a key focus for a sustainable future is driving a cost-effective supply

There will always be instances where a residential placement is the most suitable option to address the needs of a young person. The residential market has changed over the years, with a reduction in the numbers of beds available in a unit due to the complexity of matching needs and managing risks of young people safely. Provision is largely privately run which means it is more of a supplier's market due to the level of demand.

As part of the transformation programme, a commissioning workstream has been developed to delivery sufficiency of placements for the future.

Targeting residential placements through three initiatives:

- Introduction of a local pilot scheme focused on 16+ young people vulnerable to exploitation supported by an in-reach service from teams across the council and company
- Working in partnership with a specialist provider to develop a local residential provision, utilising Slough Council assets and working with neighbouring authorities to ensure maximum utilization of capacity
- Negotiation with all other off framework providers on rates paid.

The company fares well in terms of unit rates for residential placements when measured against statistical neighbours. £4,090 per week in Slough versus £4,617 for statistical neighbours in the latest benchmark data for 2019/20. Unit rates fluctuate in benchmark data as it compares full year costs against the number of children looked after at the end of the year, but current average rates are £4,823 per week. The projects above are expected to reduce rates to £4,555 by March 2025. This is after expected annual inflationary rises assumed at 1.5% per annum.

Close partnerships are being developed with the housing teams in the council to plan for transition of care leavers. The company is also working closely with asset teams in the council to identify possible opportunities to develop assets to serve our young people's needs in more cost-effective ways.

5.4.3. Targeting of the semi-independent market

The commissioning team are leading a procurement activity for 42 beds - 20 for supported accommodation for 16–18-year-olds and 20 for accommodation with floating support for 18+ and 2 emergency beds.

5.4.4 Increase in-house foster carer recruitment and implement new tier system

The company's in-house fostering team launched a revised recruitment strategy in 2021 and a new tier system for payments based on complexity of need of the child rather than the skill base of the foster carer. Both elements are starting to show good progress, with an increase in placements being made toward the end of 2021 and greater levels of needs being provided for. This is resulting in savings costs against more expensive independent fostering agencies.

The fostering team have set out their plans to continue to grow their in-house carers year on year. The aim is to have 62% of children placed for fostering to be in-house compared with 44% currently.

Benchmark data shows unit costs of fostering in Slough are higher than statistical neighbours at £865 per week compared to £695. The planned increase in use of in-house carers is expected to bring the blended unit rate down from £865 to £669 per week by March 2025.

5.4.5. Maximising funding into Slough Children First

The company will look to take full advantage of all income opportunities as highlighted in the income maximisation business case, a key element being the development of collaborative working with health to address the needs of children. With a focus on the child and through a tripartite co-operation between health, education and social care, efficiencies will be achieved, and exploration of joint commissioning will form part of this plan.

The wellbeing of children plays a large part of public health objectives, and the company has been successful in securing base funding from public health for the future.

Another area to be explored further is to tap into a wealth of resource with local businesses keen to fulfil their social responsibilities.

5.4.6. Further areas to reduce costs

- A summary of savings is provided in section 10 financial plans which are all supported by business cases.
- We are reviewing our respite and short break offer for children with a disability to make best use of the assets available in conjunction with other provisions in the market.
- Commissioning has a planned programme of contract tenders to be issued through 2022 to drive greater value for money across a number of non-placement costs.
- Other reviews are being undertaken to seek a more sustainable future, looking at how technology can booster efficiencies in service, reviewing of back-office

functions across council and company for opportunity to merge to create greater resilience and be more cost effective.

- Development of data and access to data will provide greater insight in a timely manner to allow for more informed and responsive decision making. This is expected to deliver efficiencies, but having automated systems will eliminate data production times and manual reporting

To successfully achieve the impact and efficiencies required in the business cases, the company will require sufficient project management and specialist resources to be meet the demanding programme of works. A bid for specialist resource has been made to the DfE and the company await a decision on the matter. The company has also written to the council requesting project and back-office support recognised as essential for the success of the plan. The Company will be an outward looking organisation developing a series of strategic partnerships to ensure quality, value for money outcomes for children and families whilst ensuring financial resilience.

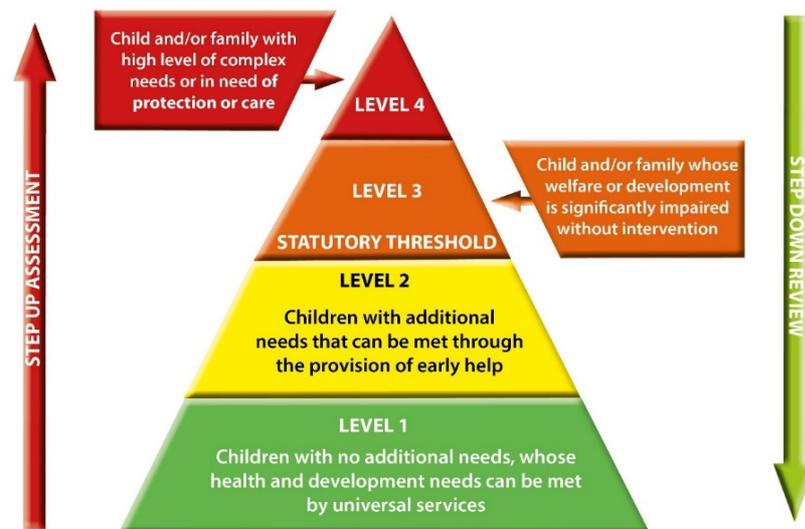
6. The Strategic Framework for Slough Children First

6.1 Business Overview and Operating Model

Slough Children First (originally Slough Children's Services Trust when it was established in October 2015) is a Wholly owned Local Authority Company of Slough Borough Council. The Company retains operational independence in the delivery of its services, and the Council as the sole owner has oversight and influence through the Company's governance arrangements. Slough Children First is referred to as 'the Company' throughout this document.

The company provides support, guidance, and social care across the continuum of additional needs for children, young people, and families across Slough. In doing so it identifies and manages risk following legislation and statutory regulations to keep children and young people safe.

The work of the company represents tiers two, three and four of a pyramid of need as described in the diagram below. The company provides specialist services for children and families with multiple and complex needs including children with disabilities. The level of support and intervention is proportionate to the risks identified, including early help, child protection services, and where required children looked after and those who are adopted.



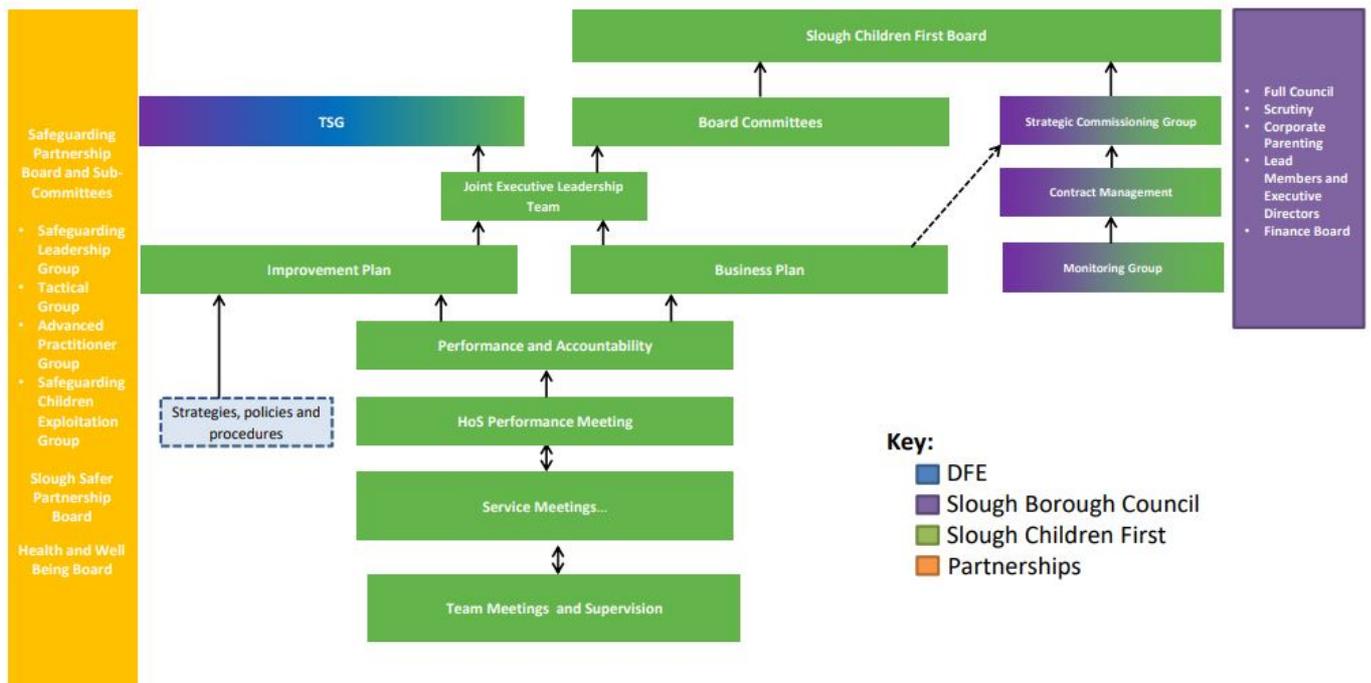
6.2 Governance Arrangements

Governance arrangements for the company are set out in the Articles of Association.

In April 2021 Slough Children First constituted a new Board with revised terms of reference to reflect the wholly owned status of the company. The new company Board consists of an experienced independent Chair, the company Chief Executive/Director of Children’s Services, two Executive Directors, and six Non-Executive Directors, three of whom have been recruited independently and three who are senior leaders from the Council.

The Company Board is responsible for setting and driving the vision and strategy for the Company and holds the Company’s Executive Leadership Team to account for its delivery. Each of the three independent non-executive directors (NEDs) has a specific portfolio covering Audit and Finance, HR and Organisational Development and Social Work practice. They work closely with the relevant member of the Company’s strategic leadership team to oversee the management of the company’s business.

See below a diagram detailing the variety of governance arrangements for Slough Children First



7. Strategic context of Slough Children First

7.1 The local context in Slough*

Slough's local population is estimated to be 149,577, with 43,693 under the age of 18 years old. Slough has a higher younger population than England with 26.6% of its inhabitants aged 0-15 years compared to the England average of 19.2%.

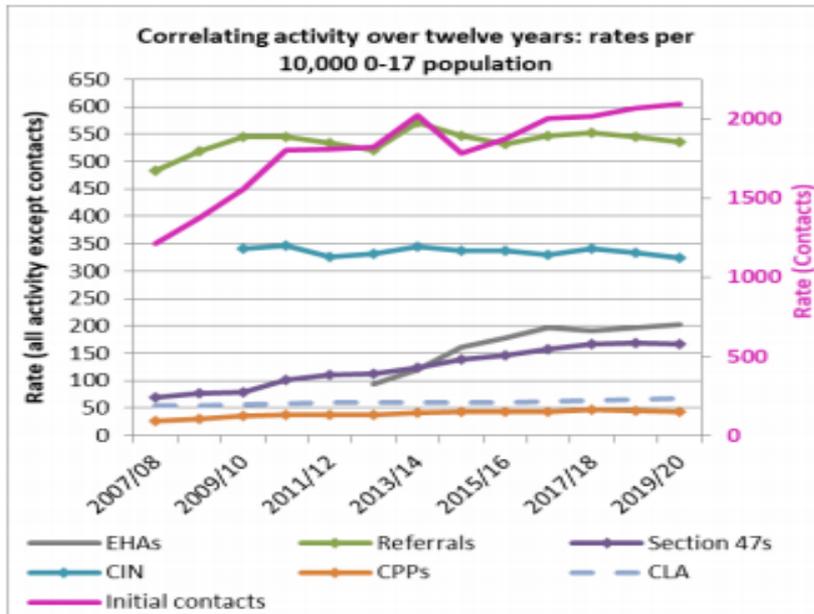
Slough remains one of the most ethnically diverse local authorities outside of London; 15.5% of Slough households do not have anyone who speaks English as their main language, 13% have been resident in the UK for less than 10 years and 88% of people in Slough follow a religion.

Pre-Covid-19, Slough had traditionally high employment because of it being home to the UK headquarters of some of the world's most successful companies and being nearby to Heathrow Airport. However, the pandemic has heavily impacted on many different employment sectors meaning its employment claimant rate is higher now than it was pre-Covid.

**Information is taken from Local Insight profile for Slough area November 2021. This uses a combination of data from the 2011 census through to 2021 DWP data*

7.2. The national context for Children’s Services and how Slough Children First compares

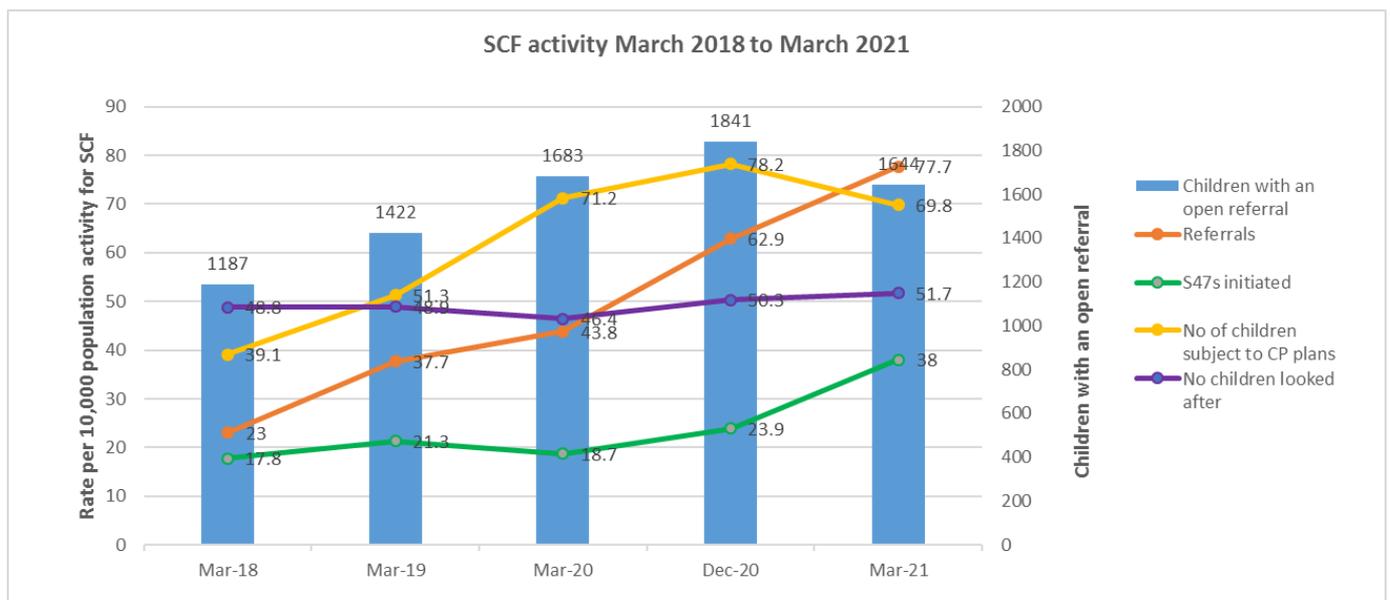
The ADCS (Association of Directors of Children’s Services) Safeguarding Pressures 7 research 2019/20 (published February 2021) highlights the following national picture looking back over the last 12 years:



‘Children’s social care activity over the past 12 years clearly shows the increase in early help assessments, initial contacts and section 47 enquiries. This is alongside significant increases in initial contacts and Section 47 enquiries. *ADCS Safeguarding executive summary Phase 7*

Figure 7 - Correlating activity over twelve years

The graph below shows similar and sustained increases in Slough Children First Children’s statutory social care activity over the past 3 years from March 2018. Covid had and continues to have a significant impact on households in Slough. The rise in food poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, the effect on the mental health of adults and increased domestic abuse has led to families having more complex needs.



Although the number of children and young people open to Slough Children First usually returns to around 1,600 each year in March, there are periods of sustained demand during the year when the number of children reaches over 1,800.

The ADCS Safeguarding Pressures 7 report (February 2021) highlights growth in demand for Early Help and social care services nationally and this is compared with Slough Children First in the section below.

Nationally Early help activity continues to increase. There were an estimated 202 early help assessments per 10,000 0-17 population completed in 2019/20. Slough is currently higher at 231.4 per 10,000 0-17 population ytd (*December 2021 CPR*).

Nationally there are significant variations between LAs on referrals with 53% reporting a decrease in referrals and 47% reporting an increase over the last two years. As seen in the graph above Slough has experienced an increase in referrals.

Nationally there has been a greater volume of in-year children in need episodes indicating the extent of children's needs and the volume of work undertaken with children and their families (*DfE, 2020*). Slough saw its number of open CIN children start to increase from July 2020 (under 500) and this number hasn't been below 500 children since.

Nationally the year-on-year increase in the number of children becoming subjects of child protection plans has plateaued which is the opposite of Slough which has almost doubled since March 2018. The national child protection rate is 55.2 per 10,000 0-17 population. (*DfE, 2020*), lower than Slough at 69.8 (*December 2021 CPR*).

Nationally the number of children looked after at 31st March 2020 had increased despite a reduction in the number of children who are starting to be looked after. Nationally this indicates the increase in the number of children looked after is not due to more children becoming looked after, but fewer children leaving care.

At the end of November 2021, the company recorded its highest number of children looked after (262 children). For Slough one reason for the recent rises in children looked after numbers are the increased numbers (33) of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) from the dispersal hotel in Slough claiming to be under 18 years old, therefore inappropriately placed and requiring children's social work support.

In Slough the children looked after per 10,000 population has risen in line with the increased numbers of children looked after and is currently 51.7 per 10,000 population. Slough's rate is comparable with the statistical neighbour averages for 2020/21 (56.1) but is below England averages (67).

Nationally there were 42,960 care leavers aged 17 to 21 in England on 31st March 2020 (*DfE 2020*), an increase of 9% in the last two years. Slough's care leaver population has increased 25% from 159 in March 2018 to 206 in March 2021. Slough's Care Leaver population will continue to rise in future years in the line with increased numbers of children in care.

All national statistics are taken from the Executive Summary of the ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Phase 7 report published in February 2021. The report can be accessed via this link. [ADCS SAFEGUARDING PRESSURES PHASE 7 FEBRUARY 2021](#)

7.3 Progress and achievements of Slough Children First in the last year

7.3.1. No inadequate services in Slough

In July 2021, Slough Children First and Slough Borough Council were in a position to state they had no inadequate services for the first time in 10 years when the Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) was judged by Ofsted to be 'good'.

Breakaway, the Company's respite children's home for children with disabilities received an inspection in October 2021 and was judged to be 'good' with 'outstanding' for leadership and management. In late 2019 Breakaway moved into neighbouring premises to enable a refurbishment to commence. It expects to move back to its original home in April 2022 and will continue its work towards achieving an outstanding inspection rating.

The company received a focused Ofsted visit of its Front Door services in January 2022. The report is yet unpublished, but Ofsted noted '*systems in the MASH are safe*' because of seeing maintained decision making in real time. (*Contacts: decision and authorisation within 1 workday – 98.7% Dec 2021*. SN / England average comparators not available.

7.3.2. The company's improvement plan

In April 2021 a new improvement plan was developed which is aligned to the company's business plan and built upon a successful focus on practice compliance and quality in the 2020/2021 improvement plan. The current company improvement plan is generating improvements in practice which can be seen in the Company Performance Framework KPIs below which monitors contractual KPIs between the company and the Council. In many indicators we are exceeding three outstanding local authorities (shown in blue). The latest version of the improvement plan is shared as an appendix to this business plan.

The company is starting the process of reviewing and updating its improvement plan for the coming financial year to cover all aspect of the company's business and this will be completed in readiness for the start of the new financial year. This update will include projects identified in this business plan as part of the transformation programme to achieve efficiencies and address any areas of improvement Ofsted identify from the January 2022 focused visit.

The improvement plan is scrutinised in a number of governance forums and is monitored monthly by the Transition Steering Group. The improvement plan is dynamic, regularly reviewed and updated accordingly

This business plan is underpinned by service plans from each service area within the company and an improvement plan, all of which are linked to the priorities of the business plan. This provides a clear link or 'golden thread' from the strategic vision of the Company through to operational delivery.

8. Company Performance Framework (Contractual KPIs)

8.1 A suite of contractual KPIs are scrutinised by the council as part of its regular contract monitoring arrangements of company performance. These have been chosen to represent the delivery of the company's core business and gives the council a good sense of areas of strong performance and areas which require further scrutiny. Any KPIs which are red for 3 months are escalated for further scrutiny. These KPIs alongside a suite of other monthly performance information which is also shared with the Council.

Slough Children First benchmarks itself with its own performance from the previous year, its Statistical Neighbours (SN), the South East region and England averages. To support its aspiration to 'get to good', Slough Children First is benchmarking itself against outstanding local authorities and the comparisons with Bexley, Kingston and Redbridge are included within the contractual KPIs as they were three local authorities who were willing to share their data.

Key to the colour coding in the table below:	
Red	Not on target, and outside of tolerances with no demonstrable improvement on the previous month
Amber	Not on target, but within target tolerances set in the 3 rd column
Yellow	Not on target and outside of target tolerances set but is an improvement on previous month
Green	Outcomes are meeting or exceeding local targets
Blue	Outcomes are meeting or exceeding both local targets and the outstanding comparator local authorities

Performance/ Efficiency Indicators	Target	Tolerance year 1	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar- 21	Apr-21	May- 21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	SN 20/21	SE 20/21	ENG 20/21	Bexley 20/21	Kingston 20/21	Redbridge 20/21
% of Repeat Referrals	22.0%	27+ R 23-26 A 10-22 G	12.90%	20.60%	16%	13.2%	19.9%	25.0%	24.0%	17.5%	19.4%	25.4%	27.2%	23.2%	23.5%	20.6%	27.7%	22.7%	22.1%	19.4%	21.0%
Assessments completed on time (CPR)	85.0%	0-78 R 79-82 A 83+ G	78.10%	88.70%	85.70%	88.90%	95.30%	90.40%	87.60%	73.5%	71.4%	67.6%	87.0%	89.3%	91.3%	88.9%	88.7%	87.6%	94.2%	n/a	95.9%
ICPC timeliness (statutory measure by child)	80.0%	0-69 R 70-74 A 75+ G	70.00%	68.10%	76.60%	78.8%	27.6%	59.3%	71.4%	90.5%	77.8%	94.1%	66.7%	89.7%	75.0%	84.3%	82.0%	83.0%	81.7%	96.2%	97.9%

Performance/ Efficiency/ Indicators	Target	Tolerance year 1	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar- 21	Apr-21	May- 21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	SN 20/21	SE 20/21	ENG 20/21	Bexley 20/21	Kingston 20/21	Redbridge 20/21
% of Children subject to CPP with all reviews within timescale	92.0%	0-85 R 86-89 A 90+ G	64.70%	75.60%	80.30%	83.5%	83.5%	82.5%	88.2%	90.5%	91.1%	92.2%	92.1%	91.6%	92.3%	94.0%	92.7%	93.2%	97.3%	100.0%	100.0%
CP Visits undertaken on time	90.0%	0-80 R 81-87 A 88+ G	95.80%	97.60%	97.60%	89.2%	83.5%	93.8%	87.4%	82.0%	80.9%	81.1%	88.4%	89.3%	87.7%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
% CLA visits undertaken on time	90.0%	0-84 R 85-89 A 90+ G	90.90%	93%	93%	94.2%	95.9%	91.9%	90.0%	93.6%	86.3%	84.9%	89.6%	87.6%	81.9%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Timeliness of CLA reviews	92.0%	0-85 R 86-89 A 90+ G	95.70%	87.50%	97.50%	97.5%	97.5%	83.0%	97.6%	96.4%	93.6%	91.6%	89.6%	88.4%	85.8%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Participation in CLA reviews	92.0%	0-85 R 86-89 A 90+ G	87.90%	95.60%	94.40%	80.8%	89.3%	93.3%	88.0%	91.5%	93.3%	85.3%	91.2%	100.0%	100.0%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Placement Stability - short term	12.0%	16+ R 13-15 A 0-12 G	6.50%	7.10%	5.20%	6.7%	7.7%	7.8%	6.9%	8.3%	8.3%	6.0%	6.1%	5.3%	6.0%	8.3%	11.0%	9.0%	10.0%	10.0%	7.0%
Placement Stability - long term	65.0%	0-60 R 61-64 A 65+ G	87.50%	88.50%	85.20%	88.9%	83.2%	83.6%	83.6%	81.5%	74.2%	76.1%	74.2%	74.2%	72.1%	69.7%	68.0%	70.0%	57.0%	55.0%	69.0%
Care Leavers EET	52.0%	0-43 R 44-49 A 50+ G	45%	44.40%	45.70%	50.0%	50.2%	55.1%	58.1%	60.0%	58.4%	58.2%	56.2%	52.9%	53.5%	51.7%	51.0%	52.0%	57.0%	54.0%	54.0%
CLA placed over 20 miles away	20%	32+ R 26-31 A 0-25 G	30.30%	30.10%	28.90%	30.0%	30.0%	31.1%	33.8%	35.0%	32.2%	33.5%	35.9%	34.7%	34.1%	21.7%	28.0%	21.0%	20.0%	26.0%	18.0%
Care Leavers with a pathway plan (18+)	85%	0-75 R 76-82 A 82+ G	89.2%	83.4%	84.3%	93.9%	96.5%	95.7%	93.2%	84.4%	89.7%	89.7%	89.4%	87.1%	88.5%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

9. Slough Children First Improvement Plan – Plan on a Page

Business Plan Priorities	Quality improvement through a child's journey	Stability of Workforce Sustainability	Quality improvement through a child's journey	Quality improvement through a child's journey Sustainability	Quality improvement through a child's journey Stability of workforce	
2021/22 Improvement Plan Priorities	<p>1. Quality of practice across the child's journey Sponsor: Carol Douch with Lesley Hagger Lead: Briege Gilhooly</p>	<p>2. Stability of Workforce Sponsor: Carol Douch with Raj Bhamber Lead: Kate McCorriston</p>	<p>3. Participation and engagement Sponsor: Carol Douch with Lesley Hagger Lead: Sandra Davies</p>	<p>4. Permanency and Sufficiency in Placement</p>		<p>5. Culture and Change Sponsor: Andrew Fraser with Tony Hunter (Chair) Lead: Carol Douch and Kate McCorriston</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of practice Model of practice Quality of assessments SMART, clear and directive plans Quality of direct work and visits Child Exploitation Transitions Clinical Support Systems & forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff retention Workforce development and creating the conditions for social work to flourish Career development for young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hearing and acting on the views of children, young people and families Participation Child's voice across their 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective permanence Permanency planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficiency Inclusive offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity and Inclusion Effective communication, listening and acting on the views of staff A listening organisation which celebrates its workforce Culture
<p>Governance and Accountability Sponsor: Matt Marsden Lead: ELT</p>						

10. Financial plans

Financial strategy and plans

Key financial aims;

- To radically improve cost reduction/efficiency
- To work in partnership with the Council to address the financial constraints in Slough Borough Council.
- To set a balanced budget and work within the financial envelope year on year to provide greater stability for the council's financial planning model.
- To support the delivery of the strategic aims of the Company in line with the Council's vision, ensuring children are safe secure and successful.
- Drive a model of efficient and effective practice across the company to achieve the best outcomes for children.
- Work in partnership with the Council to ensure support services are fit for purpose and delivering against the strategic aims of the company in delivering effective services.
- Ensure opportunities from one-off transformation funding is put to good use of delivering change and improvement delivering on longer term benefits for service users, the Company, and the Council.

Key financial priorities

To deliver the best possible outcomes for children at the same time as ensuring value for money and cost-effective services, the following key priorities are a focus:

- Maximise funding opportunities into Slough.
- Stability in workforce
- Effective early help services
- Working in collaboration with partners to address children's needs
- Strong practice and processes
- Effective commissioning of services & placements
- Effective back-office functions to support front line services

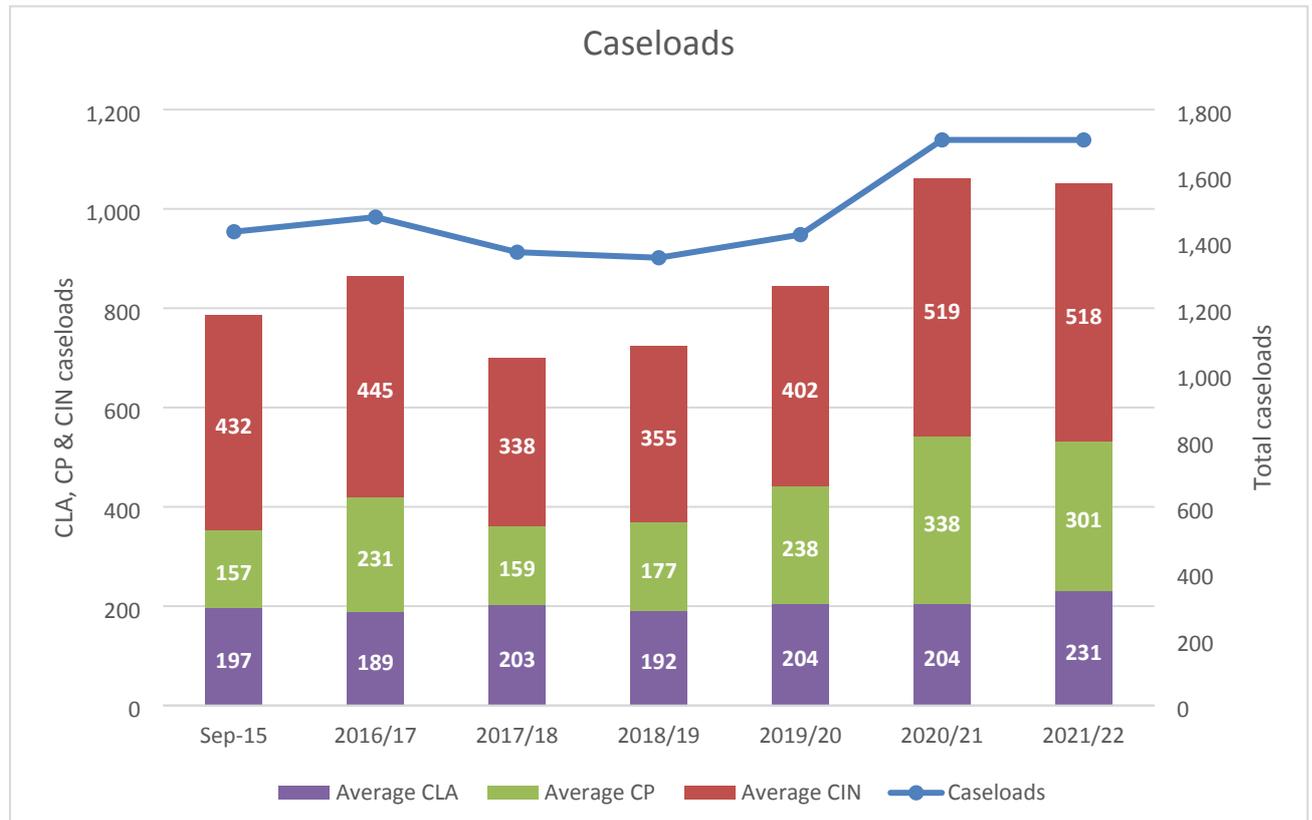
Financial context

The Company's plan looks to deliver a balanced budget in 2022/23 which considers a net reduction in core contract funding of £2.7m. To achieve this the company must deliver an estimated £4.7m of savings, recognising projected growth in demands. The Company has consistently overspent against its budgets in the past, with demands exceeding the budget estimates. This questions the ability to be able to achieve the set targets for 2022/23.

Although demand pressures will continue the company will continue to be fully open and transparent in how it is achieving required savings and providing proper value for money. While children's spend here as elsewhere will always have volatility and unpredictability built in, it is essential the council has confidence in financial grip and control along with a demonstrable understanding of trends and trajectory, So that the

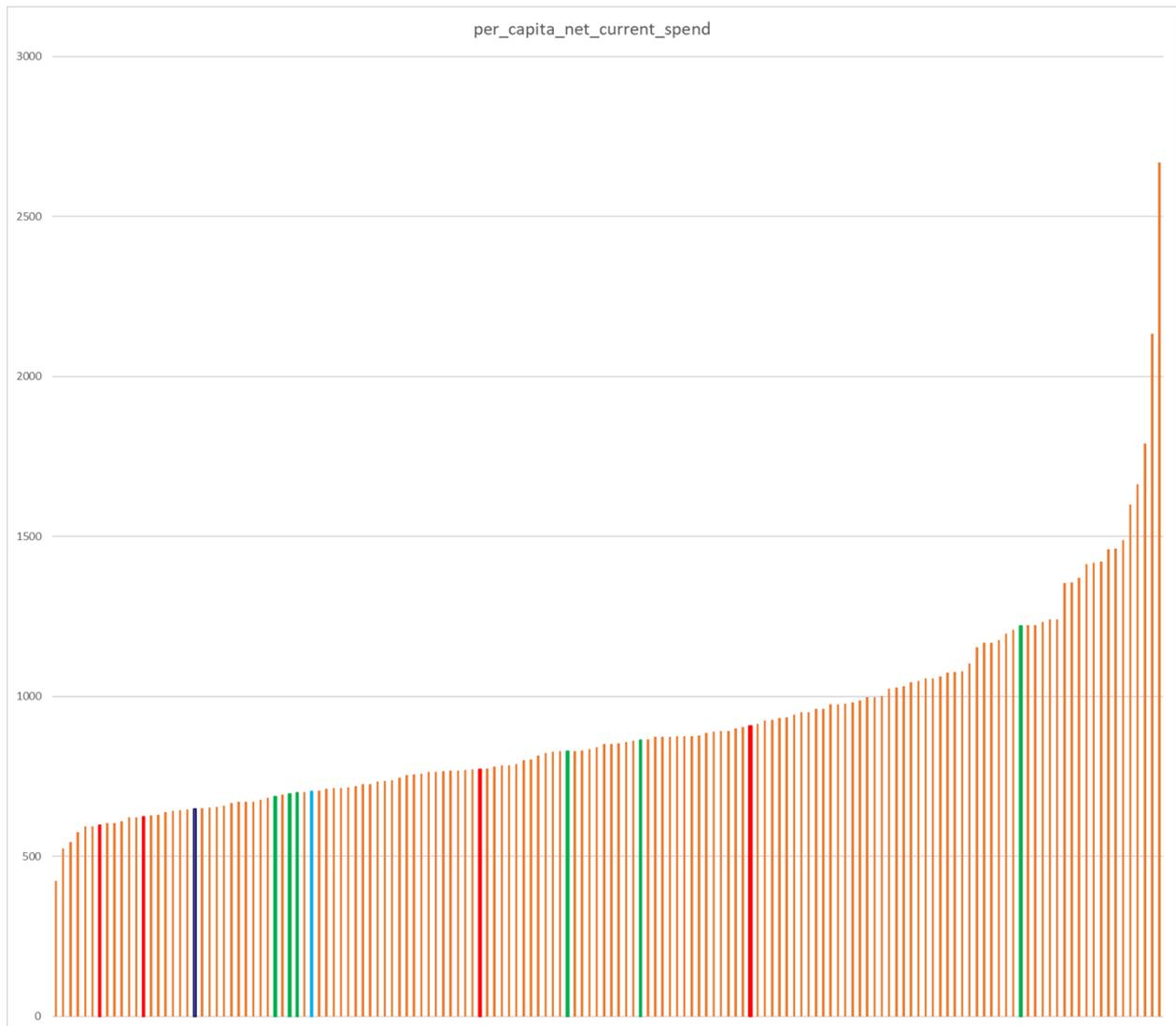
risk of surprises is minimised in every possible way. This is particularly important given the company’s recognition of the extent of the councils financial challenges over the coming years

The table below shows the levels of activity and the impact Covid has had in 2021/22 & 2022/23. It is estimated that Covid has resulted in £2.9m of additional cost against budget in 2022/23.



Slough Children First spend per capita is in the top quartile for the lowest spend per capita (S251 benchmarking data 2019/20). The graph below highlights Slough in light blue in comparison to authorities in the England where Slough are ranked 35th lowest spend per capita out of the 151 authorities.

The dark blue line represents Slough following the implementation of the savings targets for 2022/23. This shows Slough’s rank improving to 17th in England. The chart shows Slough in comparison to statistical neighbours (close neighbours in red, not as close in green).



How these aims will be delivered

Consideration is given to the most effective models of operation whilst recognising the limited scale in Slough. The company is working closely with the council in reviewing the split of services between the two organisations to find the most optimal and cost-effective solutions to deliver the best outcomes for children. This requires careful consideration and assessment to ensure any changes are the right thing for children now and in the future.

A review of scope of services is expected to be completed by August 2022 with the intention making recommendations for the next iteration of the business plan.

Spend on the workforce

Slough spend on social work per child in need is favourable to statistical neighbours, with Slough reporting £115 per week compared to statistical neighbours' £132 per week (15% lower). This is likely to be a result of higher caseloads per worker, a key factor which needs to be addressed to support a reduction in turnover rates. Work on Early help is aimed to reduce caseloads back down to establishment levels.

It is recognised unit rate spend is high, the plans to implement the workforce strategy as highlighted in the transformation programme and underpinned by the staffing savings business case, looks to reduce turnover rates for key front-line staff, reducing the reliance on agency and Innovate teams, which will deliver the savings highlighted in (section 10 financial plans) savings summary.

Effective Early Help

When comparing Slough with close statistical neighbour Redbridge, 12% of Redbridge's spend on children is for family support compared to 6% in Slough (S251 benchmark 2019/20). Redbridge spend per capita on children's services (excluding education) is £597 compared to Slough at £704. This suggests investment in early help and family support delivers an overall more cost-effective model.

Slough's transformation plan captures our ambition to develop early help functions in Slough to reduce the demand on statutory services to within establishment levels, making more manageable caseloads for key front-line staff. This requires investment to develop the service which has been included in a bid for transformation funding with the DfE for 2022/23. It will take time to embed the continuum of early help and impact on caseloads, the impact of which will not be seen immediately. Expectation is to see a reduction in statutory caseloads from a more targeted early help service by October 2022, allowing for the reduction in Innovate teams.

Strong practice and processes to support this

The medium-term plan captures the opportunity to reduce business support in the company with the development of the infrastructure and systems. Having systems which are user friendly, able to update with ease and provide real time alerts and reports which strengthen practice and lead to a more cost-effective model.

This area needs development and a detailed diagnostic of the main child recording system, looking at best practice elsewhere in the country to learn from their experience. This is not expected to deliver benefits in 2022/23, however the analysis will need to be undertaken in 2022/23 to deliver efficiencies in 2023/24.

Effective commissioning of placements

Recruitment of in-house foster carers remains a key strand of company activity, and financial plans are based on a net growth of eight fostering households per annum to deliver significant reductions in rates paid to the independent sector.

Within the company's transformation programme is a plan to recruit specialist foster carers for older children with complex needs. This will reduce significant costs spent on specialist residential provision but will require money to be spent on specialist training of foster carers to meet greater complexities of need.

The role of commissioning in achieving a balanced budget is vital and a large proportion of the company's current and future transformation plans. Significant work is planned in the semi-independent sector for children aged 16 + which is a current area of high spot purchase for Slough. A tender is due for imminent launch which will

see a significant shift in the cost base for many of our 16+ cohort of placements. Market research has been undertaken to test the validity of the business case and confidence is high around the success the plan will have.

Commissioning is also looking at an opportunity to develop local residential provision for more complex therapeutic needs. Interested parties have already come forward and keen to work in partnership with Slough Children First. Discussions have commenced with the Council to identify housing opportunities to support these plans.

Benchmark data suggests Slough fare well with rates for residential against statistical neighbours, at £4,090 per week compared to £4,617 for statistical Neighbours.

Cost effective back-office functions

The Company is driving greater accountability ensuring managers are aware of and addressing their budget management responsibilities through training and regular support from the finance team.

The company is also exploring how software can assist in delivering a more cost-effective model. This is captured in the staffing structures business case, looking to target corporate functions. The business case also explores opportunities to merge back-office functions with the council to develop more sustainable and economic services.

The table below highlights the savings with key deadlines and associated risks to be delivered which are intended to get the company back within budget.

The savings are part of the plan to bring budgets back in line, although further assumptions have been made in order that the budget will balance, these include;

UASC income will be received to cover the costs of UASCs in placement. Where this is not the case, it is assumed the UASC is not deemed a child and therefore not the responsibility of SCF, so no associated placement costs.

Legal proceedings have been high for some time, this is in part from an increase in complexity of need presenting through Covid. Covid has also had a part to play from delays in court proceedings, with cases being held open longer, being explored with the court user group.

The company expect the activity to fall over the coming 6 months, with legal costs falling from the current year forecast of £2.1m to £1.5m in 2022/23 in line with average prior year spends on legal support.

Area of spend	Outcome	Milestone	Value 2022/23 £000's	Risk
Income	Collaborative working to address outcomes for children		1,274	Partners accepting changes and increased costs to them
Income	Grant income funding of services	Apr-22	372	
Income	Funding of key health functions for young people		309	Partners recognising the benefits
Income Total			1,955	
Pay & agency	Transformation of early help services	Apr-22	340	Consultation with staff, opportunities exist elsewhere
Pay & agency	Reduction in corporate support	Jun-22	81	
Pay & agency	Restructures of roles	Apr-22	227	
Pay & agency	Efficiencies from technology	Oct-22	96	Requires investment
Pay & agency	Recruitment and retention	Apr-22	935	Requires early help strategies to reduce caseloads, and overseas recruitment to land effectively
Total pay and agency			1,679	
Placements	16+ pathway tender	Aug-22	313	Interest in the market against the tender
Placements	IFA recruitment	Mar-23	221	Recruit net 8 additional households in the year
Placements	Local 16+ provision for exploitation	Apr-22	238	Resource to stabilise placements
Placements	Invest to save in planned placements	Jun-22	15	
Placements	Local residential offer	Dec-22	10	Ability to identify housing assets to develop for residential
Placements	Targeted rates for variable support needs	Jun-22	55	
Placements	Negotiated contract rates	Oct-22	50	Resource capacity to delivery plan
Placements total			902	
Support to children and young adults	Investment in respite care	Jul-22	140	Resource capacity to delivery plan
Total support to children and young adults			140	
Overheads	Remote working savings		49	

Total Overheads

49

Total savings

4,725

The savings of £4.7m in 2022/23 is a challenge with a number of recognised risks attached. The biggest risk areas pertain to income contributions to packages of care, an area the company has experienced issues in the past. A clearer focus on collaborative working across partner agencies to deliver child focused outcomes is intended to address historic barriers. Work is underway to develop new ways of working with key partner agencies.

The recruitment and retention strategy is also a significant risk. History shows marginal successes in recruitment resulting in reduction of agency numbers, however in recent years this has worsened in light of increasing demands nationwide and an ever shrinking pool of experienced social workers. Consideration is being given as to whether additional family support workers and business support could lift some of the burden from social workers to help address the issue.

The company has seen some success with overseas recruits, with 7 joining the company in August and a further 8 due to arrive in February. Key to the success will be the ability to retain these new recruits. The company has also been successful in attracting newly qualified social workers, so the pipeline for the future looks promising.

The need to retain staff is fundamental in building the stability required in order to release the Innovate teams and provide continuity and improved outcomes for children, young people and families. The Innovate teams makes up a sizeable proportion of the saving in the plan against current year spend. The other key aspect to having the ability to release the Innovate teams is seeing manageable caseloads for remaining staff. This includes a reliance on targeted early help strategies being successful and diverting demand for referral and assessment teams and having the ability to step down casework from child in need plans.

8b Profit and loss account

The table below shows the forecast projections for the medium term. This includes a deficit in 2021/22 which the company will be seeking additional funding from the council as per the contract to meet the additional demands seen in the service against those budgeted assumptions, largely a consequence of Covid impacts and growth in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The forecast shows a balanced position for 2022/23 having incorporate £4.7m of savings into the plan. The plan includes a bid to the DfE for transformation funding, which is not guaranteed, along with a request for project support from the council, both essential for the delivery of plans.

2023/24 shows a surplus to help contribute to the council's savings plans. This is after a reduction in DfE contribution to the running costs of the company.

A small further surplus is expected in 2024/25, with further reductions in DfE funding.

Profit & loss account	Forecast outturn 2021/22 £000's	Plan 2022/23 £000's	Plan 2023/24 £000's	Plan 2024/25 £000's
Income				
SBC Income	(31,334)	(31,434)	(31,868)	(32,292)
SBC other income	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
DfE Income	(2,025)	(2,025)	(1,850)	(1,675)
DfE transformation funding	(1,481)	(1,845)	0	0
Grant Income	(2,134)	(3,310)	(3,310)	(3,310)
Other Income	(1,445)	(1,274)	(1,274)	(1,274)
Total Income	(38,520)	(39,988)	(38,402)	(38,651)
Expenditure				
Pay & Agency	17,088	16,564	16,240	16,557
Placements	14,631	14,363	13,908	13,770
Support to children and young adults	3,252	2,461	2,022	1,806
Legal fees	2,098	1,506	1,250	1,250
Overheads	1,287	3,180	3,203	3,183
DfE Transformation costs	1,481	1,845	0	0
Other savings and one-off costs	0	70	(180)	(180)
Total expenditure	39,837	39,988	36,442	36,387
(Surplus) / Deficit	1,318	0	(1,960)	(2,264)

The medium-term plans include the targeted reduction in core contract funding from the Council of £2,674k for 2022/23. There is an expectation further reduction in the core contract value will be required in 2023/24 to help address shortfall in the Council's budgets. This has yet to be reflected in the above plans.

Budgets for 2022/23 include the full year effect of early help services transferred to the company, along with the inclusion of full support services recharges following the agreement of the new support service agreement.

Pay and agency

Pay & agency	£000's	
Forecast spend 2021/22		17,088
Growth		
Full year effect from early help TUPE	594	
Commissioning establishment	150	
CLA establishment	52	
Pay inflation	250	1,046
Base budget		18,134
Savings		
Targeted early help savings	(157)	
Staffing restructures & efficiencies	(265)	
Reduction in Innovate teams	(1,480)	
Reduction in reliance on agency	(1,379)	
Offset by recruitment to permanent posts	1,710	(1,570)
Budget 2022/23		16,564

The table above identifies the growth requirements in 2022/23 to support the ongoing commissioning activity to drive a cost-effective model of delivery, along with additional social work capacity to meet the escalating numbers of children looked after.

Savings are expected from several transformation initiatives through reshaping of services to be more targeted and focused around those most vulnerable families. Other areas include the development of technology and systems to make roles more effective.

As highlighted above, the introduction of an enhanced pay package is expected to attract more permanent staff, resulting in reducing reliance on Innovate teams and agency staff.

Placement budgets

Placements	£000's	
Forecast spend 2021/22		14,778
Planned placement end impact		(1,121)
Growth		
Current rate impact	670	
Growth of CLA	482	
Increase in permanence	(7)	
Contractual inflation	175	1,320

Base Budget	14,977
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Savings

AMZ full year impact	(236)	
In-House IFA recruitment & tiers	(221)	
Reduction in emergency placements	(27)	
UASC rates	(53)	
16-25 initiatives	(76)	(614)
		<hr/>

Budget 2022/23	14,362
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Placement spend is high currently with a recent influx of new children looked after, in part due to an increase of mother and baby assessments, though plans predict a number of these placements ending in the coming months. The plans also factor in future growth in numbers of children looked after at the same time. Rate increases because of complexity of need have also been accounted for along with contractual pay inflation expectations.

To partially offset the growth requirements are a number of transformation initiatives highlighted earlier within the commissioning workstream and within our in-house fostering service. This looks to deliver savings of £614k in 2022/23 and this rises to £1,350k in 2023/24 with further development and full year effects.

Other child support costs

Other child support costs

Forecast spend 2021/22	3,126
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Other BAU movement for care leavers	(89)
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Savings

16-25 initiatives	(237)	
Reduction in external adoption fees	(77)	
Development of respite services	(32)	
Pupil premium one off funding	(93)	
Reduction in S17 spend	(137)	(576)
		<hr/>

Budget 2022/23	2,461
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The largest element of other child support costs covers support for care leavers encompassing both accommodation and support. The 16+ pathway plan also includes accommodation options for our care leavers, and we are looking to develop a floating model working within housing benefit levels for these young people. This will deliver savings of £237k in 2022/23, increasing to £620k in 2023/24.

Other transformation areas being targeted are Short Breaks and packages of care for children with a disability and we are looking to promote greater use of direct payments to carers to reduce rates paid for care.

Overheads

Overheads

Forecast spend 2021/22 1,287

Growth

New support service recharges	1,688	
Removal of one-off release	88	
Full year effect from early help TUPE	6	
One off opportunity from DFE funding	131	1,913

Base budget **3,200**

Savings

Savings in printing and telephony (17)

Budget 2022/23 **3,183**

Other overheads reflect one off benefits gained in 2021/22, adding growth to spend for 2022/23, including the additional costs from the implementation of the new support services agreement recharges from the council. Small savings are expected in telephony from closing old numbers no longer in use, along with benefits to be gained from reduced mileage claims following an increased local placement provision through the delivery of commissioning activities.

8c Cash flow statement

Slough Children First Ltd Cash flow 2021/22

	£000's
Surplus / (deficit) for the year	(1,318)
Movements in working capital	
Decrease in debtors	9,521
Decrease in creditors	(11,359)
Cash generated / (absorbed by) from operations	(2,754)
Cash generated from borrowing	5,000
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents	1,844
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year	5,057
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	6,901

The cash flow statement shows sufficient funds at the end of the year to meet the liabilities of the company as they fall due. The cash balances are positive as a result of the £5m loan facility provided by the council. The £5m supports the working capital on a day to day basis to ensure the company has sufficient funds to pay its bills. The £5m loan facility will be paid back to the council at the end of the contract or when services return to the council.

Given the projected in-year losses, and a medium-term financial plan that does not manage to fully recoup those losses, a risk remains over the ability to repay the loan in full at the end of the contract term.

8d Balance Sheet

Balance Sheet	as of 31		
	Mar 2021,	as of 31 Mar 2022,	as of 31 Mar 2025,
	£000's	£000's	£000's
Current Assets			
Debtors	11,933	2,412	2,412
Cash at bank and in hand	5,057	6,901	11,120
Total current assets	16,990	9,313	13,532
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	(16,990)	(5,631)	(5,631)
Total current liabilities	(16,990)	(5,631)	(5,631)
Net current assets	0	3,682	7,901
Long Term Creditors - Receipts in Advance	0	(5,000)	(5,000)
Total long-term liabilities	0	(5,000)	(5,000)
Net Assets / (Liabilities)	0	(1,318)	2,901
Reserves			
Income and Expenditure Account	0	(1,318)	2,901
Reserves	0	(1,318)	2,901

There is little expected movement in the debtors and creditors across the years, the balance sheet reflects the surpluses expected to be delivered in 2023/24 & 2024/25 on reserves and cash balances.

As highlighted above, further contract reductions in future years have not been reflected, which is expected to eliminate the surpluses and reduce the impact on reserves and cash balances.

8e Revenue budget and working capital requirements

Working capital requirements are expected to be met through the £5m draw down facility which has been utilised from the council. As can be seen from the cash flow statement above, it is anticipated that sufficient cash and working capital is available for the company to continue to operate.

8f Capital expenditure requirements

None identified currently, consideration required for development of reporting platforms.

[1) The council understands that there might be circumstances such as an invest-to-save arrangement where capital expenditure might be relevant to the company's business planning process. For example: developing additional capacity in foster carer homes and development of council assets to meet local placement sufficiency needs.